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MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE IN CHINA

*From a Social and Secular
Standpoint*

*Being a Resumé of an Article by
Chester Holcombe, for Thirty Years
Connected with American Diplomatic
Affairs in China, Printed in The
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Missionary Enterprise in China

By Chester Holcombe

ARE missionaries as such at all responsible for the unrest in China? Have uprisings large or small had their origin in popular protests against missionary enterprise? Do the Chinese Government and the Chinese people feel the presence of missionaries to be an unwelcome intrusion and an impertinent interference?

These ideas, so commonly met and so constantly reiterated—sometimes as questions, frequently as positive assertions—have again and again been disproved by friends of the missionary cause. But—seemingly because they *were* friends—their testimony was not widely accepted. A cause was needed to explain certain effects; a scapegoat to bear the burden of certain sins—and the missionary proved very convenient.

Important Testimony

It is, then, a matter of great moment that testimony of the highest and most unbiased character bearing upon these questions has been given to the public.

Those who wish to form an intelligent opinion upon the facts of the case have now the means of doing so without accepting the defendant's testimony in his own behalf. For it is not a missionary—not even, so far as is shown, a Church member—but a diplomatist, who speaks. And he speaks as a diplomatist, seeking the factors which underlie and influence the national situation in China, simply that the truth may be known and justice done.

Mr. Chester Holcombe, who discusses this subject in *The Atlantic Monthly* for September, has been for over thirty years intimately associated with American diplomatic affairs in China. Several important volumes, such as "The Real Chinaman," and "The Real Chinese Question," have issued from his pen. He holds no brief for missionaries; with the ethical or religious questions involved in their presence in China he has nothing to do; even of the moral influence they exert he does not speak. He views the matter from a purely secular and social standpoint. Whether the Chinese people and the Chinese government want them or not, whether their presence is an aid or a menace to the peace and progress of the nation—these are the important questions with which he deals. And in the treatment of this subject "neither conjecture nor hearsay form the basis of conclusions reached, but facts gained

through a long and necessarily close study of the missionary question in China, innumerable discussions, and much practical experience in the adjustment of so-called ‘missionary cases.’”

Why Missionaries Suffer

The first corroborative fact cited by those who are disposed to lay any measure of blame upon the missionaries, is that in the Boxer rebellion and other lesser uprisings it is almost invariably the missionary and his native convert who have suffered ill-treatment or loss of life. In explanation of this, Mr. Holcombe reminds us that “the Boxer uprising was an abortive attempt to drive all foreigners of every class from China, and thus to save the empire from partition and distribution among the great cormorant Powers of Europe—which was believed to be the distinct purpose and inevitable result of the continued presence of foreigners there; in fact, missionaries formed the only class of alien residents who had no part in the development of such a fear and frenzy. They suffered most because they alone of all alien classes had established themselves at remote parts of the interior, in close touch with the people, and out of reach of battleship, cruiser, or any other means of defence or place of refuge. In a general raid against all foreigners, the missionary was first attacked because he

was first at hand, and, to put it frankly and truthfully, he suffered because he was in or part of bad company; not because he was a missionary, but for the crime, in Chinese eyes, of being a foreigner."

Christianity Not Forced Upon Chinese

Nor is Mr. Holcombe disposed to accept the theory that uprisings are in any measure a protest on the part of the Chinese against an alien and unwelcome form of religion which is being forced upon them. He says: "To talk to persons who choose to listen, to throw wide the doors of chapels where natives who desire may hear the Christian faith explained and urged upon their attention, to sell at half cost or to give the Bible and Christian literature freely to those who may care to read them, to heal the sick, without cost, who come for medical treatment, to instruct children whose parents are desirous that they should receive education—surely none or all of these constitute methods or practices to which the word *force* may be applied under any allowable use of the English language. And this, thus briefly summarized, constitutes the entire body of missionary effort in China. . . . There is no difference between the work of pioneer preachers in the Far West, that of laborers or 'settlement workers' in

the slums of great cities, or of eloquent pastors of wealthy and fashionable churches in the Back Bay district of Boston or Fifth Avenue in New York, and that done by missionaries in China. If the last named force the acceptance of Christianity upon their hearers, then so do all the others. . . . Those who assert that Christianity is wholly unsuited to the Chinese character, that the Chinese will not and cannot become sincere and loyal Christians, are most respectfully referred to the long list of native martyrs, of both sexes and all ages, who readily and gladly gave up their lives in the Boxer movement, rather than abjure the Christian faith.*

"It might further be added that unselfish men and devoted women, enthusiastic in what appears, to them at least, to be a great cause, who are ready to expatriate themselves and to abandon all their ambitions and their lives to its promotion in foreign lands, have as good a right to carry out their self-sacrificing wishes, to enter China and do their chosen work there by all proper methods, as have their fellow-citizens who seek the same empire in order to win a fortune by dealing in cotton goods, kerosene, silk, tea, or possibly in opium.

* Those who are desirous of securing information on this matter are referred to "The China Martyrs of 1900," by Forsyth; or "China's Book of Martyrs," by Luella Miner.—Editor of THE SPIRIT OF MISSIONS.

They have precisely the same right, no greater and no less, to the protection and sympathetic assistance of their own government as any other class of citizens. To more than this, American missionaries have never made claim."

The Real Cause of Outbreaks

What, then, is the cause for this hatred for the foreigner which now and again breaks forth in such blind fury and of which the missionary is so frequently the victim? Mr. Holcombe, as a careful student of history, finds it, not in rebellion against an unwelcome religion, but in a smouldering sense of the injustice and selfish cruelty which has from the beginning marked the dealings of presumably Christian nations in their intercourse with China. "The entering wedge," he says, "to break open the barred doors of Chinese seclusion was driven home by the military power of Great Britain mainly in order to force a market for Indian opium, of which that Christian government held a monopoly. From that day to this every form of foreign enterprise in China, irrespective of character or nationality, has been tainted with opium and hindered by the hatred, suspicion and contempt engendered by the eventual success of this monstrous scheme to despoil China in brain, body, and pocket, for

the sake of gain to the exchequer of Great Britain. To this must be added more than sixty years of unjust and inexcusable diplomacy, the exploitation of China to suit the rival ambitions and satisfy the ever-growing greed of the great European Powers, robberies of its territory upon every border, and a consistent disregard of every claim which the Chinese might put forward to the ownership of their own territory and the management of their own affairs. Most clearly it must be understood that not the missionary in the cabin but the opium and gunpowder in the hold has fixed the hatred and established a permanent opposition among the Chinese to all things foreign. Once for all, it must be most emphatically declared that not Christian propagandism, but most unchristian policies and practices of aggression, dominance and spoliation upon the part of certain governments of Europe brought about the horrors of the Boxer uprising."

No Special Privileges for Missionaries

It is a common but mistaken impression that extraordinary privileges have been asked for missionaries and grudgingly granted by the government under practical coercion. Nothing could be further from the truth. "Our own

government," he declares, "is particularly careful upon this point, asking special favors for none, and exerting its efforts, when occasion arises, for its people as American citizens only. It is not permitted even to state the calling or avocation of the bearer of a passport, and though the request has often been made by Chinese officials that this be done in the case of missionaries in order that special protection and assistance be afforded them, it has been necessary to refuse the request as contrary to statute or regulation. The missionary possesses only such privileges, exemptions, and immunities under treaty as are granted to his fellow-alien of every other class and occupation. The right to reside, acquire property, and to pursue his calling at certain specified centres of population, mostly upon the sea-coast, and to travel freely under passport, throughout the interior, covers all to which he is entitled under the official pledge and seal of the Imperial government of China.

Attitude of the Government

"Yet, from the inception of what may be termed modern missionary enterprise in China, the missionaries have gone beyond this narrow limit of favor, gone beyond the treaty ports, until now they can be found in every province and in nearly every large city. Even in many mud-

walled villages and rural hamlets missionary families are now to be found quietly and permanently established in homes, in close touch and intimate association with the native residents. This special favor, unobtainable by any other alien class in the empire, has assuredly not been won either through any exercise of governmental force or diplomatic pressure. It has been slowly gained by the exercise of patience, tact and discretion upon the part of the missionaries themselves, under the open eyes and with the tacit, though unspoken, consent of the Imperial authorities. . . . The Emperor will neither force nor forbid the residence and labors of missionaries at any points beyond the treaty ports. But recognizing and appreciating the self-denying and philanthropic character of missionary effort, he will gladly permit those engaged in it to establish themselves throughout the interior, wherever they may be able to do so with the consent and the good will of the people of the locality. It is not known that this well-established line of policy has been formulated and officially communicated to any foreign power. But it has been verbally declared to the writer by members of the Cabinet and other high authorities of the empire upon many occasions."

Not only has the Chinese government opposed no barrier, and indeed given a

tacit consent to the extension of the sphere of missionary enterprise far beyond the limits imposed by treaty, but the authorities have never, in the case of injury to persons or property in towns not covered by treaty regulation, pleaded this fact as exempting them from responsibility and reparation. The witness borne upon this point by Mr. Holcombe is most positive, and indicates clearly that the real desire of those in authority is to deal fairly with the missionaries, and to recognize the value of their unselfish efforts for the good of Chinese humanity. He says: "The government has never, within the knowledge of the writer, attempted to shirk full responsibility for the lives and property of American citizens in any part of the empire, or to claim that missionaries, in establishing themselves in the interior, ran their own risk, took their lives into their own keeping, and must themselves bear any financial losses which local opposition to their presence might entail upon them."

Chinese Sympathy for Mission Work

Of course, the facts thus far stated are in a large degree negative; that is to say, they do not necessarily indicate approval of, or sympathy for, missionary work as such on the part of the Chinese

government. Positive evidence of this is hardly to be expected, yet Mr. Holcombe cites instances of official and semi-official acts which indicate that the authorities do recognize in Christian missions as conducted among them a valuable factor in the modernization of China. For example, an official commission coming to this country took pains to visit, among the other places upon its list, the offices of the American Board, which is the parent of foreign missionary organizations in the United States and has large interests in China. The members of this commission, though not themselves Christians, repeatedly expressed their gratitude for what was being done in their home-land, and said: "We know who our friends are."

It is also matter of common knowledge that influential and prominent Chinese are constantly making large donations to missionary hospitals and schools; that they are fostering the rapidly increasing demand for Christian literature and educational works; and that they are showing special and unsolicited courtesy and assistance to missionaries. All these facts, the writer declares, are evidence that "whatever may be the opinion of foreigners, either resident in China or in their native lands, China itself, as represented by the leaders of thought and public opinion in it, has recognized and accepted the missionary enterprise as one

of the most important and useful factors in the creation and development of new life in that ancient and antique empire."

Value of These Statements

It would have been almost useless for an avowed friend of the missionary cause to make statements like the above with the hope of having them widely received. There are many people who would be only too ready to attribute their positiveness either to ignorance or to invincible prejudice, but we fancy that even these will scarcely be prepared to discredit or gainsay the assertions of a man who, with unbiased view, has been so long an observer of actual conditions upon the spot.

Mr. Holcombe would have conferred a great benefit upon missionary enterprise had he done no more than that which is outlined above, but he proceeds to touch upon a matter which is being constantly brought forward, and presented—as missionaries and their friends have believed—in a false light. There is certainly a widespread impression that constant friction exists between the great body of the Chinese and the missionaries who live among them; that there is indeed a covert distrust and hatred, waiting only the opportunity for expression. It is worth while, then, to have a statement like this: "In many years of intimate

official and friendly intercourse with all classes of Chinese in every part of the empire, the writer has never heard even one complaint of, or objection to, the presence of American missionaries in China, or the character of their work."

Of course, cases of friction do arise. It would be impossible that foreigners should live with any intimacy among such a people as the Chinese without sometimes—and frequently unintentionally—giving cause of offence. "The missionary cases" to which Mr. Holcombe alludes are of this character. Not all missionaries are wise, nor are all Chinamen lacking in foolish superstitions and prejudices. But so far as the attitude of the Chinese people is concerned, the writer declares that "with greater mutual intelligence and less frequent occasions of misunderstanding, these causes of friction and conflict have, in great measure, disappeared. The true character and great value of the missionary enterprise as a factor in the modernization of China, and in bringing it into line with the great nations of the world, is almost universally recognized and appreciated, at least by those who are being most radically affected by it."

Commercial Importance of the Missionary

The final point upon which Mr. Holcombe touches does not concern those of

us who believe in missions for their own sake, and yet it is worthy of note that, in the opinion of a trained and careful observer, the value of the missionary enterprise to the cause of commercial expansion is reckoned as a great one. This is, of course, no argument for preaching the Gospel in China, or anywhere else, nor is it a thing which as believers in Christian missions we would care to see brought forward, but Mr. Holcombe has treated the whole subject from a secular point of view, and he renders a service to the cause of truth and justice in asserting that in the missionary enterprise is to be found an agency unequalled by any other for the development of our commerce. He goes on to say that "every missionary is, whether willingly or unwillingly, an agent for the display and recommendation of American fabrics and wares of every conceivable sort. Each missionary home, whether established in great Chinese cities or rural hamlets, serves as an object lesson, an exposition of the practical comfort, convenience, and value of the thousand and one items in the long catalogue of articles which complete the equipment of an American home. Idle curiosity upon the part of the natives grows into personal interest which in turn develops the desire to possess. Did space permit, an overwhelming array of facts and figures could be set forth to prove the inesti-

mable, though unrecognized, value of the missionary as an agent for the development of American commerce in every part of the globe. The manufacturing and commercial interests in the United States, even though indifferent or actively hostile to the direct purpose of the missionary enterprise, could well afford to bear the entire cost of all American missionary effort in China for the sake of the large increase in trade which results from such effort."

What This Enterprise Deserves

Is it not time that, in the face of testimony like the foregoing, cheap sarcasms and mean misrepresentations concerning missionary work and its results should cease? An enterprise which has won, and honestly won, for itself—in the face of, and in spite of, the distrust and ill-feeling which Christian governments had justly incurred—the good will even of those who are not its converts, and the protection of a government which only a few years ago was avowedly hostile to it, should certainly receive from the men of a Christian nation at least the same fair treatment and no less cordial support than that which is given it by the Chinese themselves.